

LETTERS

Crisis for Biodiversity Collections

ALTHOUGH WE AGREE WITH DONALD Kennedy about the importance of seed and other germplasm collections ("Agriculture and the developing world," Editorial, 17 Oct., p. 357), and we support the efforts of the Global Conservation Trust and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research to preserve these collections, many other critical biodiversity collections are facing challenges as well (1, 2). The biological collections in natural history museums and herbaria also serve vital roles in protecting sustainable agriculture, including the identification and mitigation of invasive alien species, and enabling biological control. When the cassava mealybug threatened collapse of the staple diet of millions of Africans (3), successful biological control was achieved only after in-depth research on classification (systematics) with museum collections. These collections also allow identification of disease vectors and pollinators, document ethnobotanical practices, and support a vast array of other uses (4). Museum collections have a set of globally agreed-upon plans of action, including the Global Taxonomy Initiative and Global Strategy for Plant Conservation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (5),

References

1. S. E. Miller, L. M. Rogo, *Cimbebasia* **17**, 197 (2002).
2. Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Biological Resource Centres: Underpinning the Future of Life Sciences and Biotechnology* (OECD, Paris, 2001).
3. J. Zeddies, R. P. Schaab, P. Neuenschwander, H. R. Herren, *Agric. Econ.* **24**, 209 (2001).
4. House of Lords, *What on Earth? The Threat to the Science Underpinning Conservation*, HL Papers 118(i) and 118(ii) (Stationary Office, London, 2002).
5. S. Blackmore, *Science* **298**, 365 (2002).
6. R. E. Gropp, *BioScience* **53**, 550 (2003).



It is ironic that, just as the U.S. National Science

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—MILLER ET AL.

but international investment has been insufficient. It is ironic that, just as the U.S. National Science Foundation increases funding for biodiversity research, many states are threatening to discontinue support for their collections (6).

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